

Galt (J.M.)

A

# LECTURE

ON

## IDIOCY:

BY

JOHN M. GALT, M. D.

Superintendent and Physician

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EASTERN LUNATIC ASYLUM OF VIRGINIA AT WILLIAMSBURG.

RICHMOND, VA.

ENQUIRER BOOK AND JOB OFFICE.

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## N O T E .

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THE following effort is one of a Course of Lectures, which has been recently introduced by the writer, as a means of treatment in the Eastern Lunatic Asylum. Touching the utility of Lectures in Asylums for the Insane, it would be out of place to say more at this time, than that they have been delivered to the patients of several of the best institutions for the insane in Scotland and America; and where so adopted, that they have been very favorably spoken of by those having the supervision of the charities referred to in such relation.

*Williamsburg, May 1859.*



## A LECTURE ON IDIOCY.

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“ROME is yet a city of palaces and temples, and of ruins still more glorious and divine than they.” Such is the commencement of one of Shelley’s prose paragraphs—a style of writing in prose, as elegant and eloquent, as his poetry is refined and exquisite. After speaking of the sublime ruins of Rome in other aspects, he proceeds to allude to their moral bearing. And he concludes, that these gigantic relics, though only calling to mind sad recollections of gladiatorial shows, of reckless power, and barbarous rites, still are grand and glorious, when the reflection is hence evolved as to the capabilities of man in working out mighty results—and the hope of future noble efforts in a better direction is thus educed from works, which in themselves are only the dreary tokens of man’s errors. There is truly something in the general aspect of Rome, which at once reveals to the traveler from our new country, evidence of the vast power displayed by the human race in erecting structures which time itself has not prevailed against; and at the same moment the entire absence of the better feelings of

the heart, to the latter of which the present age offers a picture directly the reverse.

The last of the conquering empires, Rome concentrated all that was proud and mighty, and glorious of the great nations, over whose wide realms her victorious eagles flew. We turn to the Piazza del Popolo, the Piazza di Monte Citorio and the Piazza di San Giovanni Laterano, and we see piercing the sunny air and mounting to the azure sky of Italy, three obelisks hither conveyed from the far-away sands of Egypt, and taken from the once proud temple of the sun at Heliopolis—which was merely a heap of ruins in the reign of Augustus, but was a splendid city when the dynasty of the Pharaohs ruled over the Valley of the Nile. Again you enter the magnificent collections from the antique in the Vatican, the Capitol, and the Villa Albani. And you view before you the miracles of Grecian art; Niobe, weeping for her lost offspring; the marvelous Laocoön, the noblest group of statuary that genius has ever produced; and the immortal beauty which shines forth in the Apollo Belvidere, as bright and effulgent an embodiment of all the perfections of sculpture, as is the sun, of which Apollo was the deity, of the most vivid light which gushes forth from Heaven's broad dome. But further, as relics in relation to another conquered people, on the Via Sacra, stands the graceful arch, along the frieze of which is represented the triumphal procession of Titus, on the occasion of his victories over the Jews—the ornaments of the temple at Jerusalem, the table of the show bread, the seven-branched golden

candlestick, the silver trumpets, and other spoils from the holy city being still visible, as wrought by the chisel of the cunning artificer in the olden days. But again, in the chaste Pantheon, we find a type of Rome's multitudinous conquests; for having adopted the deities of all the lands which she overcame, a place of worship was here provided for the whole of them. Lastly, as a specimen of the intrinsic majesty and grandeur of Rome herself, we have, besides other gigantic remains, the sublime and imposing extent of the wonderful Coliseum.

“A ruin—yet what a ruin! from its mass  
Walls, palaces, half-cities, have been rear'd.  
While stands the Coliseum, Rome shall stand;  
When falls the Coliseum, Rome shall fall;  
And when Rome falls—the world.”

Yet in the very pride of the unsurpassable grandeur, which Rome here exhibits, lie the depths of her weakness in character, when compared with the nations of the present day. For in this colossal structure what do we see?—A structure that arises at the close of ancient civilization, of Roman conquests, of Roman adaptation to the civilization of anterior empires. What do we behold? Naught alas! that appeals to any of the best feelings of the heart, naught that redounds to man's government of himself, or sacrifice of himself to the welfare of others. The voice of the dead ages answers us! Let the truth be told, in the words of a poet, whose superb genius was as essentially grand as this wondrous erection:

"I see before me the gladiator lie;  
He leans upon his hand—his manly brow  
Consents to death, but conquers agony,  
And his droop'd head sinks gradually low—  
And through his side the last drops, ebbing slow  
From the red gash, fall heavy, one by one,  
Like the first of a thunder-shower; and now  
The arena swims around him—he is gone  
Ere ceased the *inhuman shout which hailed the*  
*wretch who won."*

Let us now turn to the present: like Rome, we Americans can also boast of god-like men in our annals, and illustrious deeds on the historic page; as she had, we likewise are perhaps characterized by prominent faults, and by some compensating virtues. Our eagles too have flown over a space equal to that which was traversed by those of Rome. To the obelisks, and especially to the Cyclopean coliseum, we can show nothing equal or analogous. But we possess a class of institutions scattered through the country, to which Rome was a stranger, and through which we have attained an exalted position, that she never reached, or even had the soul to aspire unto. Each state of the Union either has or will soon have some suitable provision for their mentally afflicted children—and truly the stars, emblazoning our radiant standard, are in this relation fit types of what they designate, since here at least we are under benign and heavenly influences. ~~For~~ three orders of suffering in behalf of which public aid is especially demanded, aid has been extensively provided in America. First, there are the

insane: and then come the blind, and the deaf mute—unfortunates whose mental manifestations appear in a measure clouded, rendering them very suitable recipients of public assistance—because owing to the close connection between the senses and various psychical phenomena, the absence of any sense seems to involve a mental condition of a peculiar nature. Placed in asylums where scientific experience can systematically act, the deaf and dumb and the blind become new creatures, alike as to action and enjoyment, when compared with their previous condition, or with what they would be elsewhere.

If in Rome the traveler witnesses to the utmost the sublime in art, both in architecture, in painting and in sculpture; if, as to the past, he realizes in the relics of antiquity, objects which powerfully excite the associations of classic lore; he finds in a neighboring territory an analogous source of interest, as appealing to his feelings, by offering to view the finest scenery that the earth can afford; and modern remembrances which thrill the spirit equally as much as the most marked examples in ancient times! In Switzerland, indeed, the American tourist must feel a coequal interest with that excited in the sunny plains of Italy. In visiting Switzerland, the advice is given by those acquainted with its matchless landscapes, to take a route along the foot of the higher Bernese Alps in Oberland, as exhibiting the most impressive mountain views in the land of Tell and Winkelried. Here rise the majestic, towering summits of Finsteraahorn, of Moneh, of Jungfrau and the Schrechhorn, of Aaahorn,

Eigher and Wetterhorn. From natural causes, the snow on these elevated peaks is of a more continuous and of a more lustrous purity than elsewhere. They glisten in the sun of noon; and at morn and eve they are arrayed in dazzling mists, and bathed with the rosy hues of the rising and setting sun, so that they often assume an ethereal radiance that seems rather like a land of magic than plain reality. Southwestern Virginia and Eastern Tennessee have been called the Switzerland of America. They doubtless present much imposing scenery; and are by far the finest region of country that I myself have ever visited. But, after all, they lack the essential attributes of the Swiss mountains. In the first place, there is the absence of water, without which element no prospect can claim to be of the highest character; and we have secondly, in Switzerland, altitudes far more lofty than any in Virginia; and moreover, the bright crown of eternal snow is also wanting in the latter.

In the midst of the glorious Alpine heights to which we have referred above, is found Mount Abendberg. At an open space, three thousand five hundred feet above the level of the sea, we have below us the beautiful, clear lakes of Thun and Brienz, as pellucid mirrors repeating again the noble views which tower above them, and form a grand monument to God's power and majesty. Below we see a thick forest of green pines; but on the opposite side rises the highest of these soaring mountains, the incomparable Jungfrau, sovereign of the mighty Alps. Far down below

lies the fair town of Interlachen, on the narrow strip dividing the sparkling lakes of Thun and Brienz, with its lively stream, its white dwellings and twin rows of trees. At the open space above mentioned, has been erected a plain but convenient hospice. And we find in this an example of a provision which is now being made for a fourth class of those afflicted mentally—thus offering an additional contrast between ancient and modern times. This class is the unfortunate one of idiots and cretins. Here in the pure atmosphere of these aerial heights, a Swiss physician (with a most extraordinary name, but most praiseworthy exertions) has during some years labored earnestly for the ill-fated cretin.

Cretins are idiotic from birth, and their wretched appearance betokens their hapless mental condition. The forehead is low, the top of the head comes to a point, the lower part of the face is prominent, the look is dull and stupid; and they have thick lips, a large, flat nose, and coarse hair. A characteristic complication is bronchocele or goitre, that is a swelling of the thyroid gland, one of the glands of the neck; imparting to these melancholy objects a still more unpleasant aspect. Wherever there are cretins, goitres are met with, but goitres exist in some places where there are no cretins. In approaching the countries where cretinism exists, one meets with but few goitres; these are afterwards found more frequently, and at length cretins are to be seen. Cretins often however do not exhibit this symptom. Mr. J. Hutchinson, in a recent article in the "Medical Times and Gazette,"

says of those whom he saw in a late visit to Abenberg, "none of the patients were affected with enlargement of the thyroid gland to any noticeable extent." The cretins however are usually the children of goitrous persons. Cretinism springs up not necessarily, in mountainous regions, but in the low, narrow valleys of elevated localities. Dr. Guggenbuhl believes that there are at present not fewer than 10,000 cretins in the Swiss Cantons, and at least an equal number in Piedmont. And in Savoy, and the three departments of France—Isere, Basses and Haute Alps, or Lower and Upper Alps, M. Niepce enumerated in 1850, no less than 54,000 cretins, or about five per cent. of the whole population, estimated at nearly a million. Esquirol states that they occur among the Alps, the Pyrenees, the Asturias, the Carpathian mountains, the Cordilleras, &c. Parents of healthy constitution and sound organization of body seldom have cretins in their families. When females of the Valais marry Savoyards, who are usually dissipated, they are more apt to be thus afflicted, than when marrying Frenchmen or mountaineers of the higher Alpine country, generally of sober habits. Stammering is common in the Valais, and parents who have this defect, are more liable to the calamity of cretin children than others. It was once supposed that goitre and cretinism were owing to drinking snow-water, but they have been detected where there is no snow. A more plausible supposition is that they are owing to a deficiency of iodine in the water of affected districts. Certain at least it is, that this is a favorite remedy in broncho-

cele, and is much more universally diffused through nature, than was formerly imagined—and hence if there be a deficiency, it is probable that ill-effects must ensue.\* Dr. Guggenbuhl attributes cretinism to close, confined, humid situations, impure water, want of attention to cleanliness, and other errors of daily life. A writer in the Daily Press says, “It would seem that the moist and cold valleys, the marshy vapors, the want of circulation of air, the waters issuing from the snows, are the chief causes which produce cretinism.” And authorities generally agree that it is chiefly discoverable in low, marshy, confined valleys, in mountain regions. It has been asserted indeed, that it never appears at an altitude of 3,000 feet; M. Boudin says in a report to the international statistical congress, that it does not ascend in Switzerland above 1,000 metres, in Piedmont above 2,000, and in South America above 4,700—a metre being 39.37 in.

We easily comprehend that Dr. Guggenbuhl not only consulted the feeling of the beautiful in selecting Abenberg as the seat of his most laudable endeavor, but moreover in the pure atmosphere of these aerial heights found a powerful agent to aid him practically; and one of his principal remedial means consists in a continued exposure of the poor cretins to the air and sunshine—those who cannot walk being laid on the

\* Burnt sponge formerly administered here, probably owed its efficiency to the iodine contained in it, and it is a curious fact that the stems of a sea-weed are sold in the shops, and chewed by the inhabitants of South America, wherever goitre prevails, for the same purpose. It is a species of laminaria or sea-tangle, one of the algae, and is called palo coto, literally, goitre-stick.

grass to inhale the wholesome breezes of that high, pure region. It may be mentioned, moreover, that Messrs. Schubbu and Buzzorini have shown by their experiments, that the human lungs absorb on the mountains a much larger amount of oxygen than occurs in the plain—for which reason in the former locality, the nervous system is more active, animal heat is stronger, and the nourishment imparted to the body more abundant.

Dr. Guggenbuhl's treatment is always in the first place directed towards improving the physical development, before attempting aught in the way of teaching. Mild preparations of iodine and cod-liver oil are employed. Electric shocks on the head and feet are given during sleep, or in the bath, where the little patients generally pronounce their earliest distinct words. In addition, use is made of aromatic frictions on the back, with baths of the same; of preparations of steel and bark; of the waters of Wiedegg, which are in the neighborhood; of a diet of goat's milk, of meat and some few vegetables, excluding potatoes. Gymnastic exercises, which require the daily use of every muscle, are deemed very important, and excite the children to emulation in their feats; while the exercise of the faculties of the mind are equally carried on in mental gymnastics, according to the powers of each little scholar. Great and unwearied pains are taken to teach them to articulate words distinctly, and analogous measures are adopted, to those mentioned hereafter, as regards idiocy proper and its treatment. He begins also by exercising the organs of

sense, and employs for this purpose, colors, painting and music. A writer in Chambers' Edinburgh Journal says: "Music has been found to be a powerful and soothing means, interesting and refining; and we can bear witness ourselves to the thrilling effect of the voices of the happy little group, who sang to us in their infantile manner the praises of their God. Few persons, we think, could have restrained their tears while listening to that infant choir, and reflecting that but for the christian love which watched over them, their voices might still have uttered nothing but groans, and their souls remained ignorant of God their maker."

As to other results, Mr. Hutchinson affirms, that he was totally unprepared for them. Of the sixteen cretins present, with the exception of a blind one, all had been taught to read and write, more or less. One, who now acted as a monitor, Fritz Weeir, aged sixteen, entered at 8, unable to stand or speak, and completely idiotic. He had now mastered three languages, and showed his copy-book in which were written long lessons in German, French and English. Dr. Guggenbuhl informed Mr. Hutchinson, that his case has many parallels there. This pupil is able to run and walk, though awkwardly. A female, whose appearance induced the Princess Henrietta of Wurtemberg to call her the little worm, underwent a similar transformation. She was at first more like a skeleton than any thing else, covered with skin, this being cold and wrinkled. The muscles were immovable, her face deadly white, and her forehead and cheeks wrinkled like those of old persons. In three months the de-

formities began to disappear, the wrinkles vanished, and she besides learned to talk and express herself well.

This noble institution, which at the outset was treated with ridicule, has since received the utmost attention from high and low. The daughter of the Russian ambassador described it in its infancy with enthusiasm, the king of Wurtemberg gave it a personal inspection, and the king of Prussia ordered two children to be placed there from the principality of Neufchatel—a part of Switzerland in political connection with Prussia. The celebrated countess of Hahn Hahn, who had taken her daughter to the Abendberg, in the vain hope of effecting a cure (her age, sixteen, rendering this impossible),\* with a most natural sympathy for others similarly unfortunate, requested that a Valaisan child should be always maintained there at her expense, to be called *her* child, one succeeding the other when cured, and for which she bestowed the necessary funds. The success of this establishment too at Abendberg, has given rise to several others, particularly in Wur-

\* It is singular to trace the continued similarity discoverable in different nervous affections. Thus we see in insanity as in cretinism, the essential importance as to recovery, of the date of the malady. Again we find, as in the latter, the marked influence of the hereditary tendency in insanity. We see further that Dr. Guggenhuhl especially laments that in many instances parents cause a relapse from removing children prematurely from Abendberg—so common a circumstance in lunatic asylums. And in the treatment at Abendberg, as in lunatic asylums, we see the most desirable results arising, not from one or two measures, but from a multitude of items of treatment, alike moral and physical, all acting conjointly so as to produce one result—a state of things so different from home arrangements.

temberg, Bavaria, Sardinia, Prussia and Saxony. The king of Sardinia took up the subject with royal munificence, and ordered an investigation on this point, in every parish throughout his dominions.

Compared with so general an awakening, how opposite was the former condition of the cretin. It is said indeed that in the last century, when the French soldiers first met with these wretched objects, they were so cruel that in their horror or feeling of disgust, they actually had the brutality to attack the poor creatures with their bayonets. The neglect or bad treatment attending the unfortunate cretin, was also the evil destiny of the equally hapless idiot. The court fool or jester was a regular official during the barbarous ages of the past. Often, however, as in the admirably drawn character of Wamba, in Sir Walter Scott's Ivanhoe, the individual was a wit rather than the reverse; and doubtless many knaves, even at an early period of the custom, assumed the garb of folly, merely for their better success at court. But nevertheless, originally the mere institution of such an office is traceable to the inhuman proclivity to ridicule persons so afflicted. Thus history, or rather according to present views, the legends of Rome, inform us, "that Lucius Junius Brutus simulated folly so well that Aruns and Titus, sons of Tarquin, having been sent to Delphos to consult the oracle, brought him back, to make sport for them. This ridiculous abuse was handed down even to our own time, and was so general in the middle ages, that a council, held at Paris in 1212, defended the bishops for having about their persons, fools to

*make them laugh.*" Other views in times of ignorance were equally prejudicial to the poor victim. Thus take the opinion here of the great leader in the reformation, Martin Luther: "Idiots," says he, "are men in whom devils have established themselves. Eight years ago, I myself saw a child of this sort, which had no human parents, but had proceeded from the devil. He was twelve years old, and in outward form exactly resembled ordinary children. He did nothing but eat, consuming as much as four hearty laborers. If touched, he yelled like a mad creature, and with a peculiar scream. I said to the princess of Anhalt, with whom I was at the time, 'if I had the ordering of things here, I would have that child thrown into the Moldau, at the risk of being held its murderer.' But the elector of Saxony and the princes were not of my opinion."

The original meaning in the Greek of the word "idiotes," was a private man; in other words, under this primary signification, all persons except those in public office are idiots. From its first meaning, it came then to denote an individual incapable of holding a public station, and hence ultimately the meaning was transmuted into the idea of those merely wanting in capacity. In succinctly describing idiocy, perhaps we cannot accurately go further than this. For the definitions of such a condition have generally proved as unsatisfactory as those of insanity. And the same remark applies to any short description of idiocy. Thus, take M. Morel's attempt in this regard. "Idiots," he says, "have scarcely any articulate sounds.

They express their sensations by gestures, or after the manner of [the lower?] animals, by strange cries, which strike with fright and horror those near them." This account will apply to many, but not to all. Then again, there have been by Hoffbauer and others various divisions made, proceeding from imbecility, which is the least mental deficiency, to an almost entire abolition of apparent psychical faculties. Thus, at one side of the scale Pinel and Esquirol give an account of an idiot who resembled a sheep in her inclinations, manner of action, as well as in the shape of her head. This was a girl at the Salpetriere. She had a strong dislike to animal food, but ate greedily of fruit and vegetables, and drank only water. The sole indication that she ever gave of feeling or emotion, either of pleasure or pain, was by crying *bé*, and a few other syllabic interjections. She was accustomed to move her head with a sort of alternate contraction and extension of muscles, and to rub it against the person of the nurse. If inclined to resist, she attempted to strike with the top of her head. When placed in a chair, she would always slide down on the floor, and she slept on the ground, rolling up her limbs as the quadrupeds do. She was eleven years of age, her head was very small, and her back and shoulders were covered with hair two inches in length. Another unfortunate, at the same extensive establishment, was a musician, notwithstanding her different imperfections. On witnessing dancing, she leaped in time; and on hearing singing, she repeated it in a rough voice, not the words, but the airs, of

which she learned a great many. Fruit being placed at her door, of which she was extravagantly fond, an interne of the hospital commenced a complicated air, and she would abandon and not touch the fruit, but beat time, until the music had ceased. This scene also took place on a visit to her from M. Litz, the famous pianist; when too he improvised several airs, she took them up immediately. In an account of the trial of a case of idiocy, which Dr. Pagan gives in his treatise on "The Medical Jurisprudence of Insanity," he says that one of the counsel observed, "I have read somewhere, that the following beautiful lines are ascribed to an idiot:

"Could we with ink the ocean fill;  
Were the whole earth of parchment made—  
Were every single stick a quill,  
. And every man a scribe by trade,  
To write the love of God above,  
Would drain the ocean dry;  
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,  
Though stretched from earth to sky."

As a general rule, however, it is such faculties as music, number and the power of rhyming, that are found in minds otherwise idiotic; and even here, there can be never a breadth of mental action leading to important results. Dr. Howe thus speaks of one of these exceptional cases: "A few years ago, when one of these prodigies was at the height of his renown, he was examined by Mr. A——, a rude but very able mathematician, who tried in vain to perplex him by arithmetical questions. These were solved instanta-

neously and correctly, as Mr. A—— was obliged to acknowledge, after a quarter of an hour's work, with a slate and pencil, upon each of them. He then examined him a little upon other subjects; and being asked whether the youth would not make a great mathematician, replied contemptuously, ‘No! he will never be any thing but a thundering cypherer!’”

Dr. Guggenbuhl, comparing idiocy and cretinism, says, that cretinism “is always accompanied by some great defect in the constitution; while the intellect is, nevertheless, capable of being acted on. Idiotism, on the contrary, is often found in a beautiful, well-proportioned body.” This paragraph, perhaps, has a tendency to mislead and go beyond the truth. For idiocy is often complicated with other maladies. Esquirol remarks, “Idiots are rachitic, scrofulous, epileptic, or paralytic,” and Mr. Ferrus likewise, it may be observed, quotes Esquirol and Pinel as correcting another erroneous opinion, and declaring that the idiotic are more liable to diseases generally than those of good minds.

Of the definitions of idiocy, that of Mr. Sagaert seems as satisfactory as any other—“that diseased condition of the cerebral organ, in consequence of which an individual, under ordinary circumstances, is prevented from attaining to that degree of mental development and maturity usually possessed by children in early infancy.”

He who has witnessed the distress which is entailed by the existence of an idiot in a single family, will be measurably prepared to give his sanction to any ra-

tional scheme for alleviating such a visitation. But we find that idiots constitute a large class, as compared with some other sufferers who have called forth the sympathies of the public into the most decided action. Thus they far exceed in numbers the deaf mute, for whom so much has been done. The number of idiots in the American Union may be estimated at 35,000.

Idiocy being a morbid diathesis of universal prevalence amongst civilized nations, it can scarcely be wondered at, when so much has been effected for the remaining divisions of those with the mind in a peculiar condition, that at last steps have been recently taken to provide for the pitiable idiot. After the insane, the deaf mute and the blind have been general objects of systematic and practical charity for many years. When we look into any practical procedure, after a theory has been advanced for any precise time apparently, it generally happens, that further research reveals the germ of such theory far in the past. In the present light, we may designate three items of this character.

In the first place, idiots have ever and anon been placed in the institutions for the deaf and dumb, and this is natural enough, for some idiots are mute—though not from an incapability of hearing; instances of the kind, however, might easily be confounded with deaf mutes. A case of this order is mentioned by Esquirol, and indeed we presume that other establishments than that thus referred to have received one or more. Secondly, Dr. Richard Poole, formerly superintendent of the Montrose asylum for the insane, in an

article on education, in the *Encyclopedia Edinensis*, published in 1827, made some striking observations on the practicability of improving the condition of the imbecile. A third source is traceable in a circumstance occurring in France in 1801. M. Bonnaterre discovered at this date, a wild boy in the forest of Aveyron. Pinel pronounced him idiotic; but Itard, physician-en-chef of the deaf and dumb, declared him to be merely untaught. Itard took him to his own house, and for six years made energetic but unavailing efforts to educate him; and ultimately the unfortunate was conveyed to a hospital, where he ended his days. A result, however, of Itard's labors were two volumes which he published in 1807; and in 1837, Seguin, an eminent founder of the present amelioration, in commencing his exertions, may be said to have derived assistance from this experiment and its teachings. Seguin's exertions were thus begun at the Bicetre; and about the same period, M. C. M. Sagaert, the director of the institution for deaf mutes at Berlin, founded in that city the existing excellent asylum for idiots. In point of fact, there have been several physicians of note, who have turned their attention in France for many years in this direction—Voisin, Ferrus, Belhomme. In 1828 Ferrus, then the principal physician at Bicetre, undertook the education of a few of the more intelligent idiots; and in 1839, when Dr. Voisin was made physician of the establishment, a school was organized, which, although producing some good effects, was very incomplete, until M. Seguin, who since 1837, as above stated, has occupied himself .

in private with the education of idiots, was in 1842 named director.

The following list includes most of the institutions for the idiotic, now in operation. In Scotland, two—one at Baldovan, and a second at Edinburgh. In England, at Redhill, Highgate, Colchester and Bath. Dr. Hybertz has devoted himself to this cause in Copenhagen, and also M. Moldenhawer. In Schleswig, Dr. Hansen is similarly employed. At Bendorf near Coblenz, Dr. Erlenmeyer has a small establishment of the kind. In Saxony, Dr. Kern at Leipsic, and Dr. Gläsche at Hubertsburg near Dresden; in Wurtemberg, Dr. Müller at Winterbach, and Dr. Zimmers at Marienberg, are all in charge of institutions for treating idiocy. As likewise Pastor Frobst at Exberg in Bavaria, and Pastor Bost at Laforce in France. There are also schools for adult idiots in the lunatic asylum of Middlesex county, at Hanwell, England, and at the Bicetre in France. In this country, there is a state institution at Boston, at Syracuse and at Columbus. That now at Germantown is to be removed to a spot near Media, the county seat of Delaware county, Pennsylvania. An English journal enumerates Virginia amongst the states possessing charities of the kind. But it seems our policy ever to allow ourselves to be outstripped in some matters by our sister states of the Union. There is likewise a private establishment for idiots at Barre, Massachusetts.

Many of these institutions have conferred honor on the exalted personages who have taken an interest in them. Amongst other visits last year to Essex Hall,

the asylum at Colchester, was one from Prince Albert. The duke of Cambridge also paid a visit here, and the duke of Wellington. In New York, too, the management of the state asylum of this character was entrusted primarily by Governor Hunt, to some of her most distinguished citizens, of whom I may mention William L. Marcy and John C. Spencer. Only seeing the working of other schools, induced these most able statesmen to become warm supporters of this noble undertaking, instead of almost opposition and entire surprise at their appointment in the outset. Mr. Spencer indeed observed at first, "This is all wrong \* \* \* the idea of teaching and training idiots is preposterous, because teaching involves the existence of mind, and it is the want of it that constitutes the idiot. Do not take it as personal, but I must say I think none but fools would think of teaching fools." This would seem as famous a jest in New York, as an analogous one with us. For when the asylum under consideration was originally located elsewhere (at the Bull's Head tavern), the country people in the neighborhood, says a contemporary journal, "when they were told it was to be fitted up as a school-house for idiots, shook their heads, and pretty generally agreed that folks who thought natural fools could be taught any thing, were but little better than natural fools themselves."

The analogous joke in Virginia to which we allude, consists in the idea, that when the directors of the Eastern asylum have done aught particularly objectionable to some one or other, it has been often said by the party thus aggrieved, that the directors them-

selves should be placed in the asylum as patients. This sort of thing would do very well at first, and before becoming threadbare. In the British parliament, I have seen it stated that when an old joke is frequently repeated, it is the custom to put down the nuisance by the cry of "Joe Miller." But in Virginia there seems to be an utter want of knowledge on this point, that wit loses its effect, when the same old jest is repeated over and over again, *ad nauseam*.\*

Now let us look at the opinions of these able and distinguished gentlemen of New York, Messrs. Spencer and Marcy. And we would invoke here particular attention the more, as we cannot but conclude that Virginia should be led to adopt a similar policy, with such and analogous testimony. After visiting then the two institutions in Massachusetts, Mr. Spencer avowed to Governor Marcy his conversion from skepticism; his conviction that the undertaking was feasible, and that being the case, his recognition of the propriety on the

\* In addition, so common is this tendency, and so delightful seems the idea involved, that any one officially connected with the asylum is always at a disadvantage in this regard. In praise of originality, it has been said, "he who follows in the footsteps of another will always remain behind"—an adage as true and valuable as it is quaint; but let an officer of the asylum carry it into action, and there is at once raised the cry of "no wonder he acts thus and so, because he belongs to the lunatic asylum." So a Norfolk paper criticising the speech of a gentleman from Williamsburg, observed that it was just such a speech as might be expected from that quarter. And in like manner, I once heard a rabid politician from the city of Richmond say of an admirable production in relation to political economy, written by a learned gentleman in this section of country, "it should be torn up, and its leaves pasted on the walls of your bedlam."

part of the state of New York in entering upon the work ; and Governor Marcy expressed analogous sentiments. Such was the original skepticism—such the early conversion of these two great minds, as associated with the cause of the poor idiot. Governor Marcy, until he was called back to Washington, took an active part in the management of the new institution, and ever after evinced a deep interest in its welfare. In our opinion, when occupying the chair of state at Washington, the foreign ministers were about as inferior to him as the idiot is to the child of good powers. This great man has scarcely been appreciated to a due extent in the United States ; for we have had few statesmen who approached him in intellectual might. Mr. Spencer continued to act as chairman to the executive committee of the New York asylum up to his decease ; and, second only to the superintendent, had most to do with the pitiable inmates. He became the most enthusiastic member of the board of trustees ; so much so, that even the superintendent was at times anxious lest he should use too flattering expressions in the reports to the legislature, which were always drawn up by him. As such seems to be the opinion generally of those who have any experience in this regard, we do not deem it requisite to do more, at least as to the views of Americans, than to add the remarks in such relation, of a member of the daily press : “ We trust that in the course of ten years more, this class of unfortunates will be as amply provided for as the insane, the blind, or the deaf and dumb. The object of these institutions is to recover

to sanity that proportion of youth of a backward development, capable of being brought up to the average of the race, which would lapse into utter idiocy without the application of special training. There are not a few instances of persons of apparent mental imbecility in childhood, and even in early youth, who have been brought up not merely to the level of mankind, but even to a distinguished intelligence, by the use of wise and scientific, intellectual, moral and physical treatment. Failing of this success, they propose developing the imperfect faculties of those hopelessly inferior to the common run of men, and to teach them habits of cleanliness, employment and self-control, which greatly contribute to their own happiness, and to the comfort of those who have charge of them. We believe that no one who has ever seen what improvement can be worked even in what seem to be the most desperate cases, has grudged his proportion of the expense necessary to accomplish and extend it." So decided in truth was the result in the experimental institution near Albany, that no vote was recorded against any legislation in its behalf in either house—it being visited during four successive winters by a large proportion of the members of both branches of the legislature, and every opportunity being afforded them to learn the principles and observe the methods of instruction employed. So much for American experience in such relation; foreign testimony being abundantly effectual to the same end. Did space allow, we should properly conclude our effort, by a regular statement of treatment. But for the want of

room, we proceed merely to present some desultory items of management, and cases illustrating this.

If aught is to be done for the class of individuals under consideration, it is only to be effected by a public institution; isolated exertions procure little success. Idiots we may consider as beings not altogether deprived of psychical faculties, but as endued with them in a mass, on a very diminished scale; and they have hence been spoken of by some, as having their faculties in a sleeping state, so latent as to call for external effort to awaken them into action. It is thus, as M. Seguin observes, that knowledge which ordinary children acquire unconsciously, entirely escapes the idiotic; or can only be imparted to them by the aid of some one, who will take the pains himself to instruct and evoke into action their feeble mental powers, by suitably directed and strenuous exertions on his part. In his publication on the subject, M. Seguin presents an illustration of the nature of these endeavors and of their success. He likewise pays particular attention to gymnastic exercises, with the intent of strengthening the weakly physical powers of the idiot; and to lull the nervous excitement to which many of them are exposed, by operating revulsively on the muscular system. Moreover, through the same means, he inculcates order, discipline and obedience. The leading idea which M. Voisin conveys, in the successive articles which he has published in reference to this subject, is the important consideration, that however feeble in intellect the individual may be, still it is *man* upon whom we are to act—and

we should never forget the vast influence of circumstances in modifying human character. Place the idiot in a public institution, under the care of a teacher of suitable abilities; let him be surrounded by every influence which science, hygiene or medicine dictates; let him be under the continuous sway of a mode of instruction calculated to arouse his feeble mental faculties—a method founded on truths evolved from experience; and we cannot be surprised at his becoming a different creature from what he is, when left without an effort to lessen the intense degradation of his primary condition; or where, if any attempt is made, it must be inevitably rendered futile by the want of experience, and the absence of constancy.

The following are some of the particulars in treatment: There is a row of circular blocks of different sizes, and there is a row of orifices, into which they respectively fit. The idiot is taught to put each in its appropriate place, and thus he makes his first comparison and gets his first ideas of size. There is in addition a set of red, green, blue, yellow and white balls and cups. To fit each ball to its proper cup leads him to a comprehension of a difference in color. Form he derives from another set of variously shaped blocks. Of the ladder also much use is made. The teacher hangs one of the boys on this by the hands. He has but to let go to drop a few inches on a soft bed underneath; but he has no sense to teach him that. He clings tightly to the round, and perhaps cries at the uneasiness the act gives him, but he does not move. The teacher puts his arm about him and lifts him up,

lifts his hand, places it on the next round, and cheers and encourages him in a kind, loud voice—then the other hand. And so after repeated lessons, it is at last almost forced upon his sluggish mind. M. Sagaert, who is in charge of one of the most successful schools (that at Berlin), places great reliance upon regular hours, baths, gymnastic and other physical exercises. He finds complicated with many cases, and the chief obstacles to be contended against, bronchitis, scrofula, epilepsy and hydrocephalus. Still he unhesitatingly expresses his belief that the enterprise is one which ought to be and will be undertaken and pursued ; that the advantages derived are at least sufficient to justify it, and that there are many idiots who may be brought in a condition to earn their living.

Amongst other means of treatment, the older boys have been instructed in the care and management of horses and cattle ; whilst the smaller ones have had their corresponding duties to perform, such for example, as for one to feed the poultry, another the rabbits, and a third the squirrels. Thus they learn to feel care and responsibility, and acquire new ideas in watching animals. An exercise in which the boys take especial delight, is the military manual, which they go through at the word of command, drawn up in a line, with mimic guns. At the Bicetre, tickets of good conduct were given to those designated by the pupils themselves, as having done some kind and generous action—for instance, having been seen to run to the aid of those who had stumbled at play, or who had divided among their companions the bon-bons received from a

visitor. Thus they are constantly on the look out for good actions in one another, but are forbidden to report bad conduct, as tending to encourage envy and malice. One of the best exercises of the body was there found to be the use of the wheelbarrow, insomuch as it compels the idiot to walk and balance himself unaided. As regards fencing, Prince Albert, who had taken much interest in an English institution of the kind, observed to one of its instructors, "Don't you think fencing a good thing?" "Yes," was the reply, "it is the best thing possible, because every well directed muscular action implies a willing attention, which improves the mind!" At this same establishment, a boy was observed to like bowling; he could not read a single letter, but the master carved the letter at the top of the pins, and whenever the bowl knocked a pin down, he was not allowed to knock down another until he had named the letter, and thus he became capable of reading. One pupil never could fix his eye upon any thing, but he was brought to do so by catching a great glare; and the children were now taught their letters by drawing them with phosphorus in a dark room. Of the 49 pupils, 26 were writers in books, 23 on slates, 9 were readers far advanced, and 11 progressing; 10 were in the alphabet, and 10 drawing. Many of them were employed in making mats, and the bishop of Rochester had all the mats for his palace at Daneburg made in this asylum. Dancing M. Vallee observes to be one of the best exercises for developing the muscles and imparting the power to direct and govern their actions. And this opinion we should judge to be very

correct ; for a writer on dancing has pointed out the fact, that in other modes of exercise, special sets of muscles are called into play, but that in dancing every muscle of the body, as it were, is excited to action.

The following are cases showing the benefit to be derived from the influence of an institution devoted to this class of the unfortunate :

CASE I.—An orphan boy. His father died from intemperance, and his mother from consumption. He was left in poverty at a very early age, with none but a sister's feeble hand to sustain him. He was an imbecile in body and mind. Thrown among the jeering street boys of a village, his moral tastes were easily perverted ; he could not speak with distinctness, walk erect or think aright. He became obstinate, untruthful, profane, and generally depraved. He was shut out from the common schools. After entering an asylum, he was transformed into a bright boy, stammering in speech and somewhat tottering in gait, it is true ; but after a year's residence, he was sent home alone, a distance of 150 miles, by railway and stage, paid his own fare, made a visit to his friends, and was an industrious, useful and trusty boy.

The appearance of Wattie and Willie, at 11 and 12 years of age, was painful and disgusting in the extreme. Both were partially paralysed, and entirely dumb, being incapable of understanding more than a dozen words. After going to the asylum, they both exhibited as much intelligence as ordinary children of their age. Both wrote well on the black-board, and few children of their years equaled them in a know-

ledge of grammar and geography; with the rules of arithmetic likewise, they became familiar; as regards deportment, they acquired extremely amiable and affectionate manners.

CASE IV.—A girl 15 years old. She was mischievous, vicious, very nervous, and could not speak distinctly. After being in the asylum, she read well, wrote a handsome hand, and became remarkably proficient in grammar and geography; she sewed very neatly, and was very capable as an assistant in household matters.

CASE V. was a complete wild girl, of twelve years of age. To elude the gaze of intelligence, or even the look of kindness, from a stranger, she would run to the woods, hide herself behind the trees, or shrink down upon the floor, and skulk beneath a desk or chair, roll herself into a ball, and remain motionless, with her face to the ground or floor. She did not speak an intelligent or intelligible word. She knew not a letter, but was, altogether, a moving, pitiable object. After fourteen months spent in an asylum, she had become passive, obedient, cheerful, affectionate and happy. She was valuable as an assistant in the kitchen, sewing room or laundry; and in the school room had made marked progress in reading and writing. Her articulation was more distinct, and she began to converse with confidence in herself, and was fond of the needle.

At the Highgate asylum near London, eight of the female inmates have been employed as servants, showing the efficiency of their training.

In the foregoing pages, we have presented the action, and comments in relation to such action concerning the hapless idiot, in connection with Europe, and the states of the American Union on the Atlantic slope. We may fitly terminate our effort, by giving the condition of affairs on this point in the valley of the Mississippi, or in other words, at the growing west. And the more so, as we are enabled, from the items now before us, touching the treatment of idiocy, in this latter section, to fill up certain particulars which we had left incomplete, with regard to the general subject of treatment. In the history then, in the first place, of the endeavor to aid this afflicted class in Ohio, which led to the establishment of an institute at Columbus, under charge of Dr. Paterson, we have to mention a visit to Columbus of Dr. Wilbur, superintendent of the New York state asylum for idiots. Dr. Paterson, it may be remarked, was formerly assistant physician of the Ohio lunatic asylum at Columbus, and subsequently superintendent of the Indiana state hospital for the insane. Dr. Wilbur, in the visit just named, explained to the citizens of Columbus the mode of instruction adopted, and demonstrated the astonishing progress in reclaiming these unfortunates, by the exhibition of two pupils who had been under his management about four years. They had been selected from a class presenting the least hope of improvement; they were, when first placed under tuition, respectively six and eight years of age, driveling and helpless, unable to talk, uttering only inarticulate sounds, unable to walk from partial paralysis, apparently

knowing nothing, even the hand from the foot. Their proficiency, on being taught, had been such, that they exhibited a better knowledge of spelling, writing, geography, grammar and arithmetic, than many children instructed in the best schools, for only the period referred to, and commencing with the alphabet. Dr. Hill's edition of the "Medical Counsellor," gives therein an interesting account of the exhibition: "Notwithstanding," says he, "the unmistakably idiotic form of the heads, the actions and manners of these youths, the exhibition of mind and intellect, in their exercises in orthography, geography, and arithmetic, even to the extent of readily solving questions in fractions, seemed to make it perfectly absurd to call them idiots, and difficult to comprehend that they were. It would seem rather that the organs of the mind had been simply torpid, or at rest, which only needed awakening. Practically we have no doubt this is the case, whatever the theory of idiocy may be."

A second series of remarks on the subject, emanating from the west, is found in a late valuable report of the Eastern lunatic asylum of Kentucky at Lexington, and comes from the pen of the able superintendent of that institution, Dr. William S. Chipley. The wonders, he observes, wrought in the treatment of the idiot cannot be effected to any considerable extent by individual effort. The state must come to the aid of these despised and neglected children of misfortune. Early, systematic and unremitting training is necessary to accomplish the surprising and almost incredible results that have been witnessed in the schools

for idiots in this and other countries. Experience, patience and unfaltering devotion to the cause, are qualities absolutely demanded to insure success. These qualities are rarely found among the rich; and if found among the poor, the necessary leisure would be wanting to enable them to put them to the test. Schools devoted exclusively to the training and instruction of idiots can alone offer any thing of moment in this humane course. As to the question of economy, 25,000 dollars are now annually bestowed in Kentucky towards the continuance of a miserable existence on the part of these ill-fated beings. Now this large sum, he contends, would be more than sufficient to school every idiot in the state, of a suitable age for education, putting all of them into a condition to earn their own support. Thus, in the course of a few years, the question would be, whether idiots should be supported for a term of years, and prepared to earn their own subsistence in some useful employment, or we should contribute large sums to a greater number of disgusting and revolting objects during life. He concludes by the observation, "Experimental schools have been elsewhere followed by permanent and well endowed institutions; and the education of idiots is now the settled policy of many European governments, as it is of at least three of the states of this Union. May Kentucky soon be found emulating their noble example." And we cannot terminate our own remarks more suitably than by most earnestly expressing the same wish, as it is applicable to our own glorious and beloved commonwealth.









